

CDC Encourages Screening for Breast, Cervical and Colorectal Cancers



Getting screened for some cancers can help prevent them from occurring. In particular, screening helps prevent cancers of the cervix, colon, and rectum. Screening also helps find other cancers—such as breast cancer—at an early stage, when treatment can be most effective.

Because some cancers are found early and treatment options have improved, more people are living many years after a cancer diagnosis. Nearly 12 million cancer survivors are living in the United States.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the United States. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms are the best method to detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms. Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. If you are age 50 to 74 years, be sure to have a screening mammogram every two years. If you are age 40–49 years, talk to your doctor about when and how often you should have a screening mammogram.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States. It affects both men and women, and the risk increases with advancing age. More than 90% of colorectal cancers occur in adults aged 50 years or older.

Screening should begin at age 50. Those who think they're at increased risk should speak with their doctors about when to begin screening. Screening is recommended using one or more of these tests:

- Colonoscopy.
- High-sensitivity fecal occult blood test (stool test).
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy.

Screening helps find precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) in the colon and rectum, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening also can find colorectal cancer early, when treatment often leads to a cure.

Cervical cancer is the easiest female cancer to prevent, with regular screening tests and follow-up. Two screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early—

- The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for precancers, cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately.
- The HPV test looks for the virus (human papillomavirus) that can cause these cell changes.

The Pap test is recommended for all women between the ages of 21 and 65 years old.

What You Can Do

- **Women:** Get a Pap test every three years, starting at age 21.
- **Women Aged 30 or Older:** Starting at age 30, if your Pap test results are normal, you can continue getting a Pap test every three years or choose to get a Pap test and a human papillomavirus (HPV) test every five years.
- **Women Aged 40 or Older:** If you are age 40–49 years, talk to your doctor about when and how often you should have a screening mammogram. If you are age 50 or older, get a mammogram every two years.
- **Men and Women Aged 50 or Older:** Get screened for colorectal cancer using one or more of the recommended screening tests.

Through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides access to free or low-cost screening to women who are under- or uninsured. Through the Colorectal Cancer Control Program (CRCCP), local programs provide colorectal cancer screening and follow-up care to low-income men and women aged 50–64 years who are underinsured or uninsured for screening, when no other payment option is available. To learn more about these programs and about cancer prevention and control, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/cancer.